The Flappers of France and the Gallant King

The Interesting Episode in the Lives of Four Charming Young Women of the Montmartre Which Resulted in a Beauty Contest Now Being Waged With a Royal Jewel as the Prize

Above is Mlle. Suzanne and, at the top, is Mlle. Guerin, two of the young women who were guests of King Boris at the little cafe in the Montmartre.

Above is Mlle. Claudine and, at the left, is King Boris as he appears to-day. At the top is the beautiful Mlle. Felix—the rest of the contestants and their "Paris."

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BEHIND an extremely interesting beauty contest now being watched with considerable attention in Paris, the contestants being what might be called the "flappers of France," is the somewhat pathetic story of a lonely and gallant young King, whose specter pervades the reminiscences of four of the principal participants in the contest.

It would be entirely too much to say that the favor of the King—his approbation—is the intangible prize in the competition, but it is not exaggerating to say that it is because of him some pretty young women are engaging in what might be called a battle of beautiful flapperhood.

The King is Boris, the youthful monarch of Bulgaria. His part in the contest was played almost four years ago, when, occasionally, Boris—then in exile—ran into Paris incognito for a bit of the relaxation denied him in Vienna, Belgrade and Budapest, where he spent most of his time.

Very young, very engaging—almost bashful—cafe proprietors and major domos took a keen personal interest in him. He was not adventurous, and was always most discreet—quite well behaved and a great deal more solemn than usually is a prince running at large incognito in Paris.

His favorite restaurant was a little, somewhat modest cafe in the Montmartre—the same cafe, it is said, which has been given additional fame by being made the background of a play successful both in Paris and in America. Here the young King—a Prince then, or a King refusing to accept his throne, spent an occasional evening, glad of conversation with any of the patrons who elected to occupy a side of his table. His afternoons he spent at the Botanical Gardens.

It is one of those bits of untold romance, hidden everywhere in the odd corners of Paris, as well as in other places—that there should be a beauty contest in progress to-day, between a group of young women. There is a jewel in the story of course, but the King owned the jewel. It is no pearl or emerald of fabulous price, or even a bizarre gem with a history reaching back to the medieval. It is instead a modest stickpin, set with a very small chrysolis, the stone perfect and well cut, but hardly worth more in the market than a handful of francs.

Perhaps the story should be told in its sequence.

The colorful little cafe was patronized liberally by a sprinkling of all classes from the studios, workshops and little theaters in the Montmartre. One might find there whatever section of humanity he was especially interested in, a scholar, a statesman, a distinguished foreigner, an artist's model, the artist himself or a mannequin. And one might become a part of his preferred section or sit at table sipping his favorite drink and merely study the panorama.

The young Prince preferred the latter relaxation, enjoying its relief no doubt from his more studious reflections during the afternoon at the Botanical Gardens.

The story is—and it must be related only as a story that is persistent in its perseverance through four years, with its only available authorities being the four young women themselves—that Boris strolled into the cafe through its vine colored wall door and to his favorite table rather early one evening—in time for the dinner he had not partaken of before.

A waiter took his order, bringing him first his wine. Before the meal itself was served a bevy of young girls—four of them, such bits of feminine china as during the day ornament the studios or the art schools near by, chattered up to the table. They displayed confusion at the presence of the stranger and then Boris noticed a handbag, a pair of gloves and a shawl or two that had been left in the other chairs around the table. He realized he had occupied a table which these young women had reserved for themselves and which they had left perhaps but a moment or two before.

The Prince rose and made embarrassed apologies. Reaching his hat and stick he was about to bow himself away when his waiter arrived with the first courses of his dinner. The waiter was apologetic—there was no other table, it was hurriedly discovered, at which the Prince might eat his dinner or, if he remained at this table, where the young women might sit. All others were occupied.

Waiters at Montmartre cafes are resourceful—and not at all backward.

"Come—it is quickly settled," this one exclaimed with something of mischievous finality. "Monsieur will have his dinner here and the mademoiselles will sit with him. I present you to each other. Mademoiselles, may I have the pleasure of presenting Monsieur? Monsieur, you are honored—I present to you not one mademoiselle, but four. Voila! It is done. Monsieur dines and mademoiselles sit with him."

With that the waiter deposited his plates and brought an extra chair to make up the five required.

The future Czar of Bulgaria was not to be outdone by the resourcefulness of the waiter.

"If mademoiselles will further honor me—perhaps they will permit me to be their host at dinner?"

Mademoiselles, it transpired, would. Feeling safe in numbers and, as is the situation with almost all young mademoiselles from the studios or the art classes, having appetites far beyond their financial endowments, they took prompt advantage of the occasion for an unexpected feast.

Boris was a student of plants. Most plants are young. He amused himself, perhaps, by initiating a study of the young plants thus inadvertently thrust under his attention. That is one way of putting it. Another would be: Boris was a Prince, with an uncertain future. Most unfrivolous for a Prince, nevertheless he enjoyed this unconventional meeting with four young women who represented a most unroyal world.

Whichever might have been the circumstance of his reasoning, Boris enjoyed the meal tremendously. One may imagine that the young women asked him innumerable questions about himself and enjoyed, secretly, his bashfulness and rather solemn consideration of events around him. There is a room for dancing at this cafe and Boris is known to be a moderately good dancer. All young women of the Montmartre are immoderately good at this diversion. It does not run in the record that they danced, but decidedly it is possible.

There was, it is certified, an exchange of names, the Prince remaining "M. Boris."

Thus identified, the young women were:

Claudine—the Mlle. Sueur, who had come from Passy to find work and who had been engaged by M. Plaudon, one of the artists working on the great painting for the Pantheon, to pose for his various figures of Red Cross nurses, ambulance drivers and other feminine helpers in the war. She had a knack of wearing clothes, M. Plaudon declared, that more experienced models seemed to have lost. Mlle. Claudine was very joyous at her success, now four weeks old, and gayly related that she was earning as much as twenty francs a day.

Mlle. Felix, also a model, only two months in the Quarter, but already successful among artists who liked to portray schoolgirls. Mlle. Felix was very enthusiastic about her future and asked the stranger—M. Boris—if he, being so solemn and sedate, thought there could be anything amiss about her being a model rather than a dressmaker's errand girl.

Suzanne—Mlle. Tilly, who was studying in the atelier of M. de Migurac, the scenic artist. Mlle. Suzanne had displayed marvelous talent, one of the other girls confided to M. Boris, for sketching animals and houses and things during her last year at school. Her parents had scraped up all they could to give her a course under the great scene painter. She hoped she would be able some day to do sets for the opera—the Comique at least.

"Did M. Boris think the men artists ever would allow a girl to work with them on those wonderful scenes they did for the Maeterlinck and the Bergerac plays?"

And the fourth was Cecille, Mlle. Guerin, from the Lorraine. She arrived in Paris only that day and the little gathering of the four at the cafe was in her honor. She had found lodgings at the same modest hotel which sheltered the other three—and so, that very day, three young chums had become four. Mlle. Cecille did not know what she was going to do. She had to have employment, as her parents had lived in the devastated district and their savings had been exhausted. One brother had gone to work on the trams. Now that she had finished school—its first stages—she, too, must become a breadwinner.

"It is delightful, M. Boris, you should give this banquet for our little Cecille here to-night. All of us together could not have purchased such an elaborate dinner for her."

Certainly this was an occasion and a company to interest any Prince—even one with a Czardom confronting him. Almost any one would have pondered the future of these four blithesome young women—all recently escaped schoolgirls, wholesome, ambitious, carefree and confident. And all at the beginning of whatever drama or tragedy life in Paris held in store for them.

A canvass of their ages disclosed that all were in the after months of their sixteenth birthdays. The future King was himself little more than 20.

It is Mlle. Claudine, now one of the most sought after of the models whose work is done mostly for American artists in Paris, who tells the rest of the story to all who come to her to hear it over and over again:

"He was a most sympathetic young man, not at all sad, but a little wistful. And he was so earnest. He liked to laugh with us and soon we were trying our best to draw from him a really joyful smile. He was so gallant and thoughtful he put us all at our ease and we said to one another what a delightful reception he was giving us for our new friend.

"He amused himself by drawing out of us all our ambitions. He talked of art and models and the stage as if he were familiar with all three. And when we compared ages and he learned that we all were little more than 16 he was much interested.

"'Let me prophesy for you, mademoiselles,' he said. 'You each will be successful; you each will be happy, and you each will be very beautiful.'

"Then Cecille spoke up banteringly. 'Now then, monsieur, you have got your foot in it. Of course we will all be successful and happy. We know that. It is certain. But it is only you who are so sure we shall all be beautiful. Now then come! Exhibit your skill at prophesy. Which of us will be the most beautiful?

"He laughed. 'That I cannot say—Paris judged only from the evidence before him; not the prospect. I can be no wiser than he. But when the time comes—let us say when you all are 20, the age when beauty is definitely formed—I shall be glad to be your Paris and decide between you.'

"Suzanne broke in merrily: 'And will you give a golden apple with your judgment, M'sieur Paris?'

"M. Boris—as we knew him then—smiled gayly. 'I am afraid a golden apple might be beyond me—you see, I am not so certain of my future as the mademoiselles,' he replied. 'But I would not be Paris and not award a prize. Here—we will name the prize now and I will give it into your keeping. Your partnership in its possession will keep you chums, perhaps, until the fateful day.'

"With that he drew from his tie his stickpin—just a chrysolis, as you see, sir, set in hand wrought gold. He put it on the table between us and said: 'One of you take it, and all of you keep it. I shall look you up in four years and to the most beautiful then I will permanently award the souvenir.'

"Was it not droll? We accepted the challenge with a great deal of laughter—the kind of laughter young girls make. Presently M. Boris rose and bade us good night. He kissed our fingers delightfully. As he passed out the gate in the wall he turned and lifted his hat and waved it at us.

"None of us ever has spoken to him since. Suzanne saw him once, three years ago, on the Rue de la Paix. By that time we had seen his pictures in the magazines so much that we knew who had been our host that night—Boris, Czar of the Bulgarians. Each one of us felt a maternal interest in him. We felt like sisters to his two sisters, and we got to speaking of the old King, the one who was sent away, as 'Papa Ferdinand.' I saw him once on the Rue de la Paix, too, and I almost went up to him to ask about his son Boris.

"We have kept the stickpin. And now we are twenty, all of us, and a little more, and still we are chums. The stickpin has bound us together through all changes of fortune. It is time to award it. Prince Paris is a King now and could not—even if he has remembered that night in the little cafe in the Montmartre. So the other Paris, the city, will have to act instead.

"But tell me, M'sieur—now that you have heard al labout it——" Mlle. Claudine invariably asks this question when she concludes, "don't you think that perhaps King Boris does remember?"

And that is the story of the gallant King, just as Suzanne, Claudine, Mlle. Felix or Mlle. Cecille tells it and as Paris understands it. And there is the stickpin, and Max, the waiter at the cafe, who remembers the evening well; and there in the vine covered wall is the very gateway out of which Prince Boris disappeared just after he turned to wave adieux with his hat to the four little women. What more evidence is required?

There is just one little rub in the present situation. There could be no noteworthy contest between just four young women when there are so many with decided claims in Paris. So the four chums have agreed to let all the others in—only they must be the French edition of what is known in America as the flapper.

For all four have become, just as countless others of their age have become, flappers in all senses of the word—French flappers. A new and interesting development in France which will make another story for these pages.

"If one of us wins the prize," says Mlle. Claudine, "we shall be happy. If there is another young woman more beautiful than any one of us, then we shall feel we did not live up to the prophecy of Prince Boris and the four of us together will resign the tie pin to the one who is more favored. But we shall remain chums just the same."

The rest is quickly told. Suzanne, who was to be a scenic artist, has become a celebrated star of the French cinema—she is to France what Pickford is to America. Mlle. Guerin has a studio on Montparnasse and does beautiful sketches in dry point which sell very readily to dealers who put hand wrought gold frames around them and mark them with almost forbidding prices. She poses now and then, but for the most distinguished artists only.

Mlle. Felix does portraits of young women. Also she assists the most successful of the older portraitists, who so often need an intelligent model to pose for the "ensemble" of their subjects—that is, to pose in the dress being worn by the subject and to adopt the posture the artist desires at sittings when the portraitist would rather work from a model than the subject herself. "So few women know how to pose for a portrait without being self-conscious in their poise," these artists declare. They know Mlle. Felix is discreet as well as graceful and blessed with skill at wearing clothes.

It was these four who, in conspiracy between them, first introduced the ways and nonchalance of the flapper to the Montmartre.

THE human view of wasps seems to be lacking in breadth. Because they are given to stinging us we fail to do justice to their virtues. One scientist who has given much study to the matter says that the main doctrines of the wasp are, "If any wasp will not work neither shall he eat"; and "Every wasp to labor according to his capacity, and receive according to his needs in a free community."

Division of labor, it is believed, goes a long way in the nest. Some of the workers seem to be specially employed as foragers and soldiers; others appear to be told off as nurses and guardians; while yet others are engaged as papermakers and masons.

Wasps are at all times particularly fond of honey. Indeed they have a very sweet tooth for sugar in any form. Toward the end of summer, therefore, as bee keepers well know, they will force their way into bee hives as open robbers and carry off by main force as much as they can gorge of their winged neighbors' honey.

The drones of the race, instead of being idle and luxurious creatures, are sober, industrious and well behaved members of the community. They clean the streets of their town with exemplary diligence; they act as public scavengers or sanitary officers. And they have their reward; for unlike the doomed bee drones they live their allotted life in peace and quietness, till winter involves both them and their spinster sisters in one common cataclysm of death and destruction.